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AUTHOR	Pope, Myron L.; Miller, Michael T.
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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to measure faculty involvement in college governance at historically black colleges and universities (HCBUs),a study was conducted in fall 1996 at a private, historically black institution in Alabama. Questionnaires, with 25 Likert-type scale items, were distributed at a faculty senate meeting; the response rate was 79 percent (n=50). The study found that: (1) faculty agreed most strongly that the issues considered by their governance body (GB) were important, that governance leaders were well prepared, and that their GB adequately represented the faculty's collective point of view; (2) faculty disagreed with statements that their GB was involved in important institutional decisions about the way the institution was run, that it was well represented on committees making decisions on policy, planning, and the allocation of resources, and that faculty were adequately rewarded for their role in the governance process; (3) it was agreed that the ideal governance process utilized the faculty senate to solicit faculty participation; and (4) faculty felt they should be more involved in budgeting, and clarifying and monitoring administrator roles. Appended are a ladder of faculty involvement in governance, and means and standard deviations of faculty perceptions of shared governance and their roles in the governance process. (Contains 10 references.) (MAB)

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Faculty Involvement in Governance: An HBCU Case Analysis

Myron L. Pope, Ed.D.
Director of Recruitment and Assistant Professor
College of Education
Box 870231
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487
(205) 348-0549
e-mail: mpope@bamaed.ua.edu

Michael T. Miller, Ed.D.
Associate Professor and Coordinator
Higher Education Administration
Box 870302
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487
(205) 348-1170
FAX: (205) 348-2161
e-mail: mmiller@bamaed.ua.edu

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Abstract

Historically Black colleges and universities are in a precarious position due to a number of factors, including public calls for greater accountability within the higher education industry, reports of bloated duplication among public higher education systems, and increased difficulty in maintaining enrollments. These challenges have forced HBCU college administrators to examine their own management styles and leadership behaviors. One common strategy has become to involve more faculty in the governance process. This report is of one faculty's perceived involvement in the co-governance process, and what they believe are ideal characteristics of a shared governance system.

The involvement of faculty in higher education governance has become a topic of increased interest during the past decade, largely due to two concurrent forces. First, the private sector has embraced quality control concepts which emphasize teaming activities, and subsequently, business and industry standards for group input through such activities as quality circles and front-line teams has become the norm. The second force working to encourage faculty involvement in governance are public pressures for institutional accountability. These pressures tend to be manifested jointly by state legislative bodies, accrediting bodies, trustee groups, alumni, and particularly, students and parents who are responsible for paying tuition and fees.

Despite the efforts to create more broad based, inclusive decision-making processes on the college campus, there has not been a definitive response to the question of the efficiency and effectiveness of involving faculty in governance. Rosovsky (1990) argued convincingly that faculty involvement is a necessity for the acceptance of decisions and policy, however, the process of arriving at these decisions or policy is not necessarily enhanced or improved with the involvement of more decision making actors. Applied research has alluded to generalizable statements about enhanced morale and teaching or research performance, yet these statements have not consistently been demonstrated throughout higher education.

The involvement movement has been examined from the perspective of community colleges (Miller, Garavalia, & McCormack, 1996), teaching and research environments, faculty performance (Miller, McCormack, Maddox, & Seagren, 1996), and even models for involvement (Williams, Gore, Broches, & Lostoski, 1987). These movements have

typically focused on the activity of and those involved in governance, developing a quilt of inter-related understandings which maintain some separateness (McCormack, 1995).

The involvement issue in administration is made even more complex when considered in the context of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). Although HBCUs have received a great deal of attention for their ability to provide specialized education environments, these institutions have not benefited from extensive research. In particular, faculty working at HBCUs have not been the subject of research related to institutional effectiveness and efficiency, and considering movements toward joint decision making, this area must be addressed by both the practitioner and academic communities. As a result of this need to examine HBCU faculty and the involvement of faculty in governance, the current study was designed as a case analysis of how faculty at one HBCU in Alabama view the shared governance process.

The Involvement Variable

Faculty involvement in governance has a myriad of expectations dependent upon the actors and scenes for particular governance issues, policy formation, decision making, and institutional culture. In a general sense, involvement by faculty represents an institutional commitment to a broad-based, inclusive decision-making process which allows for a series of checks and balances between administrators and other constituents who provide institutional services. This philosophy of checks and balances is represented against a backdrop of legal precedence, however, which greatly restricts faculty involvement in governance (Miles, 1997). In several court decisions, including Ballard v. Blount and Minnesota v. Knight, faculty have been found to have no legal basis for

involvement in the decision making process of their institutions, and a very limited basis for criticizing or challenging administrative behaviors (Miles, Miller, & Anderson, 1996).

In the context of shared governance serving as a system of checks and balances with administrative ranks, the board of trustees, directors, or governors serves a judiciary role, setting the boundaries and parameters of where faculty can be involved and to what extent decisions can be shared. With no specific legal direction, these trustees, in a sense, create the broad policy of how decisions are to be made. This subsequently calls into question the power of the faculty governing body and the rationale for its existence.

Miller (in press) argued that faculty participate in decision-making based on different sets of assumptions, and that these assumptions are generally categorized into levels of faculty empowerment. Classifying involvement into layers of non-participation, tokenism, and faculty power, Miller identified levels of involvement ranging from manipulation (Level 1) and therapy (Level 2) to delegated power (Level 7) and faculty control (Level 8; see Figure 1). These levels of empowerment assume, at least in part, that faculty have a desire to be involved in the decision making process, and that this involvement can potentially have some positive benefit.

Rosovsky (1990), drawing on his experience at Harvard University, contended that not all governance activities and administration is improved through participatory decision making. Conversely, Bergmann (1991) noted that administrative bodies have grown so rapidly as compared to faculty ranks, that participatory decision making is becoming increasingly imperative, noting "bloated administrations and blighted campuses" (p. 12).

Research Methods

Consistent with other research projects affiliated with the National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance (NDBFIG), an initial case analysis of an HBCU was undertaken. The subject for study was a private, Presbyterian HBCU founded in 1876 with an enrollment of approximately 1,000 undergraduate students, 63 full-time faculty, with a 100-acre campus located in an urban setting in Alabama. The college had three divisions and 11 academic departments. The 4-year institution had an active faculty senate which functioned as a town-hall, all-faculty meeting, and faculty were given the opportunity to voice their concerns or speak out concerning institutional policy.

In the fall of 1996, a representative of the NDBFIG attended a faculty senate meeting, described the survey instrument, and passed out and collected copies of the survey. The survey instrument consisted of 25 items, asking respondents to rate their agreement or disagreement with each item using a 1-to-5 Likert-type scale (1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree). The first section examined faculty members' perceptions of various governance issues, the second section dealt with characteristics of an ideal governance process, and the third section included items about the role faculty currently play in the institution's governance process. The survey instrument consistently achieved reliability indices of .80 and higher in all of its previous uses.

Findings

A total of 50 (79%) surveys were returned for use in data analysis, indicating that the vast majority of faculty attended the faculty meeting when the survey was distributed. No additional surveys were distributed. Several additional surveys were returned by

adjunct faculty, but these were not included in the data tabulation. According to Gilmour (1991), the response rate was determined to be more than adequate, as typically only have of all faculty participate in various institutional governance activities.

For the first section of the survey, participants were asked to consider their perceptions of the governance process relative to their institution's governing body. Faculty agreed most strongly that the issues considered by their governance body were important (mean 3.92), that their governance leaders were well prepared to assume their current positions (mean 3.73), and that their governance body adequately represented the faculty's collective point of view (mean 3.68).

Faculty at this HBCU expressed a degree of concern for the governance process in several areas. faculty disagreed with statements that their governance body was involved in important decisions about the way the institution was run (mean 2.30), that their governance body was well represented on committees making decisions on policy, planning, and the allocation of resources (mean 2.38), and that faculty were adequately rewarded for their role in the governance process (mean 2.41).

Statements regarding what the faculty perceived as being necessary in constituting an "ideal" governance process were closely clustered in ratings. The most desired characteristic of an ideal governance process was the utilization of the faculty senate as a method of soliciting faculty participation (mean 3.81). The faculty rated the statement regarding faculty empowerment to question policy decisions through a well articulated process moderately (mean 3.49), indicating some general agreement that faculty should be given the right to question the operation of the institution. Lesser importance was placed

on the characteristics of early intervention by the faculty governance unit in decision making (mean 3.30) and the use of external mediators in resolving faculty-administrator disputes (mean 2.86).

For the final section of the survey, faculty were asked to rate their perceived ideal role for serving in a shared governance. These statements were rated higher overall than the other sections of statements, and the dominant roles as rated by the faculty were that they should be more involved in developing specific outcomes for budgeting expenditures (mean 4.25) and that faculty should clarify and monitor the roles of administrators (mean 4.16). The faculty's insistence on rights and responsibilities in appropriate governance roles and the desire for faculty committees to cooperate with the administration were rated the same (mean 3.86), followed by the statement of the need for situation trust of the faculty by the administration (mean 3.73).

Discussion

The purpose for conducting this study was to examine the roles of faculty in governance at an HBCU in Alabama and to identify the characteristics of an ideal governance process. The research was unique in that it focused on the faculty at an HBCU, and despite this, the results were very similar to those found at non-HBCUs and as indicated in the research of Miller and others (1996). Faculty were found to be concerned first and foremost with their "rights" and the value of their intervention and involvement in decision making.

Although faculty held the view that their senate leaders were capable and that their senate was a reflection of their views as a whole, there were several instances where the faculty seemed to doubt the respect of administrators and board of trustees when it came to institutional decision making. This belief is consistent in statements regarding the low levels of representation on committees concerned with institutional management, the senate or council's moderate levels of communication and meetings with administrators and trustees, and the inadequate rewarding of faculty for participation in the faculty governance unit.

In the ideal governance process, faculty found it most critical for the senate to serve as a motivator for participation by all faculty while at the same time allowing them to question decisions made by administrators. This reinforces the subtle desire of faculty to be involved in policy making; the faculty collectively believes, or perhaps senses, that other faculty will be intrigued to the point of involvement.

Faculty also emphasized the desire to be involved in policy making by emphasizing that their primary notion of their role in the governance process was being involved in resource allocation. They also indicated that it was an important part of their role in higher education to define the role of administrators.

This study provides several implications for faculty and administrators at HBCUs. First, there needs to be an increased level of communication between faculty and administrators and the board of trustees. This will allow all to present their ideas and to provide an opportunity for both groups to dialogue the other party's arguments. Second, there must be improved rewards and respect for faculty who participate in the governance

process. At present, faculty feel that their ideas are not respected and that many faculty see no advantage to participation because their voice are not heard. Finally, there needs to be a clear delineation of the roles of faculty and administrators. Faculty perceive administration's role as being too pervasive and too omnipresent. This role has left many faculty out of the decision-making process and in many cases has allowed administrators to be decision-makers and planners.

This study has provided valuable understanding of the governance process in a historically Black institution. However, there are opportunities for further investigation. One of particular importance would be how this type of analysis compares to other types of institutions, and whether or not the unique context of an HBCU influences or creates an environment which is different from other types of collegial institutions.

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Figure 1.

Ladder of Faculty Involvement in Governance

8	Faculty Control	Degrees of Faculty
7	Delegated Power	Power
6	Partnership	
5	Placation	Degrees of
4	Consultation	Tokenism
3	Informing	
2	Therapy	Non-Participation
1	Manipulation	

Table 1

Perceptions of HBCU Faculty toward Shared Governance

Issue	Mean	SD	Range
Issues considered by our governance body are important.	3.92	1.06	4
Governance body leaders are well prepared to assume their positions.	3.73	.84	3
Governance body adequately represents the faculty point of view.	3.68	1.16	3
Governance body operates efficiently.	3.35	1.03	4
Management information is readily available to the governance body concerning issues it considers.	3.08	1.09	3
Governance body representatives and Board of Trustees/Directors meet regularly.	3.03	1.19	4
Our governance body attracts the most capable people as members.	3.03	.92	4
It is difficult to get people to serve on governance body and/or standing committees.	2.81	.81	3
Communication is good between our governance body and the Board of Trustees/Directors.	2.76	1.14	3
Governance body members and academic administrators meet regularly.	2.68	1.11	4
Communication is good between our governance body and academic administrators.	2.68	1.00	3

Table 1, continued

Perceptions of HBCU Faculty toward Shared Governance

Issue	Mean	SD	Range
Our governance body's operating budget is adequate.	2.58	1.11	4
Academic administrators and governance body expectations regarding the governance body's role are the same.	2.57	.83	3
Faculty members are adequately rewarded for their participation in the governance process.	2.41	.93	3
Governance body is well represented on committees making decisions on policy, planning, and allocation of resources.	2.38	.98	4
Governance body is involved in important decisions about the way the institution is run.	2.30	.81	4

Table 2

Characteristics of an Ideal Governance Process Are...

Characteristic	Mean	SD	Range
A conduit through which faculty participation is solicited.	3.81	.88	3
A body empowered to question policy decisions through a well articulated process.	3.49	1.33	4
Procedures which involve faculty early in the decision making process.	3.30	1.61	4
The use of neutral consultants to mediate faculty-administrator dealings.	2.86	1.13	4

Table 3

Roles of Faculty in the Governance Process Are...

Role	Mean	SD	Range
Faculty are involved in developing specific outcomes for budgetary expenditures.	4.27	.69	2
Faculty should assist in clarifying roles of administrators so that they know they are to administer policy and not impose their own.	4.16	.87	2
Faculty committees should work harder to cooperate with administration.	3.86	1.08	4
Faculty must insist on rights and responsibilities in appropriate governance roles (such as curriculum, graduation requirements, etc.).	3.86	1.06	4
Convince the administration that the faculty voice is a valuable component in decision making.	3.73	1.17	4